

Parent Liaison Program

House file 2527

Iowa Department of Education
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Des Moines, IA 50319

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Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0146

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Parent Liaison Program Final Report

Background:

Numerous studies have found that families of all income and education levels and from all ethnic and cultural groups are engaged in supporting their children's learning at home. Supporting parents and increasing their involvement at school is an important strategy for addressing the achievement gap. When parent/school involvement is effective, research has reported benefits for students, parents, schools and communities.

House File 2527 provided \$44,000 for the establishment of a parent liaison program. The Department of Education identified four school districts, through a competitive grant process, that each received \$11,000 to develop and implement a pilot parental involvement liaison project. The four districts receiving the awards were **Aurelia**, **Denison**, **Lamoni**, and **Sioux City**.

Program objectives included the implementation of strategies to develop the skills of school staff (teachers and administrators) to create an environment that:

1. Facilitates two-way meaningful communication between home and school;
2. Facilitates family engagement in supporting their children's learning and development at home.

Districts considered strategies for specific/unique learning and support needs of families that may:

- not speak English;
- live in poverty;
- not read;
- have a child with a disability;
- be homeless;
- not typically participate in educational activities at school with their child; or
- not be engaged in their child's education.

Grant awards were made in December 2006 and grant activities were completed by December, 2007.

Project Overviews:

Aurelia Community School District

Need: Lack of parent involvement and lack of positive communication between school and home as reported in the 2005 Iowa Youth Survey.

Target Population: All parents, PreK – 12

Activities:

- Establishment of a Parent Teacher Association.
- Creation of a Family Center staffed by parent and student volunteers for the purpose of welcoming parents and other adult visitors. The family center has a computer that parents can use to access information about their children's records.
- Early Bird conferences that provide opportunities for all families to be visited by their children's teachers before the start of the school year.
- Professional development to train staff to utilize new student management software system.
- Parent's Night Out featuring a variety of topics to promote academic achievement and enhance parenting skills.

Budget:

Teacher Stipends	\$3,230
Travel/Transportation	1,270
Supplies/Meeting Expenses	1,900
Training/Professional Development	<u>4,600</u>
TOTAL	\$11,000

Outcomes:

- PTA meetings are held monthly and there are 20-30 parents usually in attendance. Activities include staff support, educational meetings, and newsletter contributions.
- The Family Center is used on a daily basis for parent-teacher discussions on such topics as scheduling, behavior issues, and team meetings.
- Nearly 100 percent of elementary and middle school parents and 30 percent of high school parents participated in Early Bird conferences. Sixty-six percent of parents participated in Parents Night Out.
- Ninety-one of 132, (69 percent) parents have passwords issued to them that allow them to access student management software.
- Only one failing grade was issued for first semester.

Denison Community School District

Need: Reduce achievement gap for minority and low socioeconomic status (SES) students by increasing the number of home and school contacts.

Target Population: Second-grade minority and low SES families

Activities:

- Bilingual Family Literacy Backpacks that go to students' homes twice weekly and that provide grade-appropriate books, videos, puzzles, and games with activity guides for parents. Parents and students provided input regarding backpack topics and participated in the selection of materials.
- Family Literacy Nights (4) that support the materials contained in the backpacks.

Budget:

Teacher Stipends	\$1,000
Travel/Transportation	0
Supplies/Meeting Expenses	10,000
Training/Professional Development	<u>0</u>
TOTAL	\$11,000

Outcomes:

- 100 different backpacks are available for 145 second grade students to take home and share with their parents.
- Parents report that the Family Bilingual Backpacks have given homework a "new meaning" and indicate that it provides a "wonderful experience" to sit with their child and work on activities together.
- Parent survey responses written in Spanish were often returned to the school and translated – an indicator of increased home/school communication with parents who do not speak/read English.
- Teachers have noted anecdotally that students express interest in learning more during their literacy block about the topics presented in their backpacks and that students are sharing information with one another.
- Parents have been engaged as volunteers to help refill the backpacks on a weekly basis.
- Consumables will be replaced and the project sustained through the local Wal-Mart Moms program.

Lamoni Community School District

Need: Reduce achievement gaps between genders, low SES, and students with Individualized Education Programs through increased parent involvement in school and improved communication between home and school.

Target Population: PreK -12 students and their families

Activities:

- Implement activities from the Parents as Partners Toolkit “*Seeing Your School as Others See It*” that have a positive impact on the school climate/culture as perceived by parents. This included such actions as proper directions, signage, welcoming posters, telephone courtesy, and friendly staff.
- Increased parent involvement in decision-making committees and expanded parent volunteer program.
- Increased school communication with parents using telephone calls, home visits, “Partners in Learning” conference model, and parent report cards.
- Creation of a Parent Family Involvement Coordinator to analyze current practices, recommend and implement changes.
- Parent professional development offered at multiple times using a variety of strategies.

Budget:

Teacher Stipends	\$5,103
Travel/Transportation	500
Supplies/Meeting Expenses	3,897
Training/Professional Development	<u>1,500</u>
TOTAL	\$11,000

Outcomes:

- Fall conferences yielded the highest parent attendance in five years – elementary 96 percent, middle school 94 percent, and high school 61 percent.
- Seven different volunteer opportunities were provided to parents and a wide variety of monthly family activities.
- Eight community groups make regular use of the school for meetings/programs.
- A high school student internship position was created to assist with implementation of the Family Involvement Action Plan.

Sioux Community School District

Need: Increased parental involvement with school, particularly for Hispanic and low SES parents and parents whose children are in the low proficiency range. Also, increasing the number of staff having high expectations for all students.

Target Population: East Middle School students, their families, and staff

Activities:

- Four parent focus groups using the Parent Information Resource Center model.
- A variety of home school communications translated in Spanish. These communications included common phrases used in parent/school communications, answers to questions that parents frequently ask about middle school, the student handbook, and the school calendar.
- Family Science Night that was offered every 2-3 weeks and gave parents an opportunity to participate in hands-on activities with their children.
- Professional development for staff provided by a parent who attended school in Mexico.
- Community/Learning Center established in a mobile unit where community agencies can offer services to students and families and parents can access computers and other resources. In

addition, textbooks, book bags, and books in Spanish can be accessed at the center. Parents had opportunities to learn to use educational computer software.

- Various activities to engage families and support learning such as garden club, family fitness program, and a yearbook to document grant activities.

Budget:

Teacher Stipends	\$5,500
Travel/Transportation	1,500
Supplies/Meeting Expenses	2,500
Training/Professional Development	<u>1,500</u>
TOTAL	\$11,000

Outcomes:

- Absences and truancies were lower in 2006-07 for those students participating in Ready Set Achieve. Juvenile Court referrals and discipline referrals were also lower.
- Increased attendance at Family Science Night and in parent usage of the Learning Center.
- Increased communication by parents regarding student absences resulting in fewer unresolved absences.
- Increased parent awareness about school policies, procedures, and opportunities available for their children.

Lessons Learned:

Parents will come to a learning center where they can work with their children on computers, engage in lifelong learning and recreation activities, read together, participate in community service activities and receive services from community agencies. The combination of building on strengths/interests combined with meeting basic needs in a welcoming environment appears to be a good formula for success.

There is high value in connecting parents to school by providing them with resources that help them connect with their child.

When schools make the effort to connect with families in their native language the results include greater trust, improved communication, and increased involvement by families in school.
